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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 006101

SIPDIS

EAP FOR A/S HILL AND EAP DAS JOHN NSC FOR MICHAEL GREEN AND HOLLY MORROW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2015

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RAISES KANTATHI'S COMMENTS TO PRESS ON FTA AND BURMA WITH MFA PERMANENT SECRETARY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH BOYCE. REASON: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) During a September 23 call on MFA Permanent Secretary Krit Garjana-Goonchorn, the Ambassador pointed out that Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon's reported September 20 comments to the press on FTA and Burma appeared to be at odds with what was discussed on these issues between the President and Prime Minister Thaksin in Washington. The Ambassador noted to Krit that the subsequent MFA statement refuting the news report as "misrepresentation" still left questions about Thailand's stance on these issues.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador also told Krit that he had been in contact with NSC staff who were aware that Kantathi had called the Secretary to reassure her that his comments were taken out of context and represented nothing at variance with the Prime Minister's September 19 meeting with the President. Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister's comments and the subsequent MFA statement had created concern that the RTG was adopting a utilitarian approach to the September 19 White House meeting, taking one position in Washington and saying something else for domestic consumption in Thailand (and in Burma, for that matter).

¶3. (C) Krit was aware of the AP article and the Ministry's statement, but the Foreign Minister's call to the Secretary was news to him. He noted that Prime Minister Thaksin had returned from Washington delighted with his meeting with the President, and wondered aloud why the Foreign Minister had even agreed to do such an interview only a day after the White House meeting. He agreed that the Joint Statement spoke for itself, and took note of the need for there to be concrete positive actions on both the FTA and Burma in the near future.

¶4. (C) Comment: Leaving aside the wisdom of granting an exclusive interview to an untested journalist, we do not think Kantathi was acting as anything other than the inexperienced Foreign Minister that he is. The Ambassador also raised the unfortunate interview with Thaksin's chief policy advisor, Pansak Vinyaratu, who was appalled by the whole affair, commenting "why does the Foreign Minister have to keep opening his mouth?" Before last month's cabinet reshuffle, there were rumors that Katathi might be dropped because Thaksin was unimpressed with his performance. This latest incident won't help.

BOYCE